Character, Arts and Crafts

Personal Character.

152 522 In personal character these aborigines are light-hearted and happy, with a great fondness for practical joking. Anything which places another in a position of discomfiture is hugely enjoyed. They are quick and rather violent tempered, but on the whole their temper is shortlived.

152 579 A comparatively trifling offence will quickly result in a general disturbance, in which both sexes engage, and during which weapons are brandished and an amazing amount of mutual abuse is indulged in, but usually little serious damage is done, and, having talked themselves out, life soon returns to its normal course.

●157 As might be expected, there are some few individuals of a more sullen and anti-social type who become notorious as trouble-makers, and who constitute a difficult problem for their own people. The outstanding weakness of the aborigine's character is his want of a sense of personal responsibility. Rarely does a man act on his own initiative or assume and maintain an individual attitude in regard to any matter.

[157] [182] 614 672 This is undoubtedly accounted for by the fact that in the aboriginal community the unit is not the individual, but the tribal horde. The tribe or group stands or falls together. Every member of it shares in the honour or disgrace of any one of its number. An offence by one member is regarded by another tribe or division as an offence by the whole of the offender's division. All are held as being equally guilty.

614 628 672 In such serious offences as occasion the shedding of blood, the members of the injured tribe or division make no special attempt to avenge themselves upon the individual who has actually committed the offence, but are as well satisfied if they succeed in punishing any member of the party to which he belongs. Though the tribe as a whole may strongly disapprove of the action of one of their number, by which action hostility has been created between them and another tribe, they, knowing they are all involved, must nevertheless stand behind this particular individual.

182 157 614 [672] In this way is the individual relieved of the responsibility of his own actions, and does not personally realise their results EITHER FOR GOOD OR ILL.

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
OI17 Murngin OI17

either for good or ill. Thus there are found few natural leaders among these people, a man's individuality being submerged in the life of his horde or tribe. This same fact, coupled with the extreme isolation in which this race has for centuries lived, has also served to stultify progress. 157 182 [614]

Only by a man of exceptionally forceful character could reforms be instituted, and life has consequently gone on practically unchanged for countless generations. 178

Toward those whose friendship has been proved these aborigines show a splendid spirit of loyalty. Those who treat them in a fair and friendly fashion will receive fair dealing and devoted friendship in return. 577

Arts and Crafts

The weapons and utensils used throughout this area correspond to the usual aboriginal type, but include a number of local variations. Little use is made of any weapon other than the spear, though clubs of several types are used to a limited extent, as also are boomerangs. 411

There are many varieties of wooden spears, barbed and unbarbed, some of which have the head and the haft fashioned out of a single piece of hardwood in a very remarkable way. Flaked stone spear-heads are much used, particularly for fighting, and these heads are traded over wide distances. [438]

The use of iron, particularly for spear-heads and cutting implements, has been known for many decades, this material being obtained in limited quantities from the old traders from Macassar. Only boomerangs of a heavy type are used, and these are by no means common. The light, return boomerang is unknown, as is also the shield. 177 411 439

Many types of "dilly-bag" are made, some of which are of such fine texture as to retain water. Others are highly decorated with feathers or fur woven in during manufacture. The material used in most cases is the split leaf of the pandanus palm. Other bags are made of string knotted very neatly and evenly in an open mesh. Fish nets are also constructed in the same way. 415 [285] [286]

Excellent string is manufactured from bark fibre, grass, fur, and human hair, and is used for a wide variety of purposes. Much of it designed for ceremonial purposes is decorated with feathers interwoven during spinning. Strong rope is made of bark fibre or grass, and used in the harpooning of turtle, dugong, or porpoise, and for the mooring of canoes. 283

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OII7 Murngin OII7

761 relatives and friends is a matter of amusement. It is only possible to die once, and in the ageless wandering through the unbroken round of day and night, the Stone Age fatalist finds his highest form of excitement in continuing a feud, in [921] raiding other hordes, and in other forms of violence, such as capturing women from another man—in itself a profitable pastime. A general raid is the *pièce de résistance*.

522 [152] Nevertheless I found nomads to be happy and cheerful; they bear pain and disappointment and face death with extraordinary courage. Resilient natures find humour in a mundane primeval world, and they are always on the look-out for something to laugh at—even to the extent of being amused at the contortions of an expiring enemy or at a healthy man's imitation of physical disabilities in another. Youths and men are convulsed with laughter at the antics of a man aping the gait of a leper, and at the uncertain gropings of the partially blind. Jokes are very simple, and the average is no better than a jealous remark about an old man negotiating for youthful wives: 'He must be a turtle', the reference being to the fact that a turtle usually lays several dozen eggs.

157 Under all this rank growth of primitive emotion lie the roots of qualities we value most in civilized man; such as courage, kindliness, devotion, and honesty. Stone Age man 609 is ordinarily well intentioned toward the welfare of any white man or alien stranded in the bush, and countless stories are told of their rescue of them. In such circumstances they treat them as privileged invalids, and except when bad impressions have been made by previous visitors, they are accepted at face-value. If they act as gentlemen they are treated as such; but if they abuse the hospitality of their hosts, and attempt to rape the women, as has frequently happened, they are exterminated by the only law known to the nomad.

It is impossible to walk through the bush and not notice